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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIJING 011182

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TAGS: PHUM PREL CH

SUBJECT: SECURITY TIGHT, MEDIA SILENT ON 17TH ANNIVERSARY OF TIANANMEN

REF: BEIJING 10507

Classified By:

Classified by Political Internal Unit Chief Kin Moy.
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) The seventeenth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown of June 4, 1989 passed quietly on Sunday, with an elevated security presence in and around the Square. Poloffs visiting the Square throughout the day saw no protest activity or police actions, although press reports later said that two people had been detained in separate incidents. Former leader Zhao Ziyang's home was quiet and Tiananmen activist Qi Zhiyong said no protest activities had been planned. Although many, particularly young people, know little of the 1989 violence amid the official silence, it nevertheless remains a key harbinger of political change for reformist elites. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The seventeenth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square events of June 4, 1989 passed quietly on Sunday, with an elevated security presence in and around the crowded Square. Passersby and tour groups appeared to be unaware of the significance of the date, however. Police monitored local subway stations and were noticeably present, including several busloads of riot police parked on the Square. Groups of plainclothes security loitered near the buses and mingled with police.

¶3. (C) Poloffs visiting the Square throughout the day saw no organized protest activity or police actions, although press reports later said that two people had been detained on the Square in separate incidents. There have been some reports of preventive detention of activists surrounding the anniversary, and security around Beijing and on campuses was elevated over the weekend.

¶4. (C) Text messages circulated on June 4 urging activists to take a walk on the Square, but Qi Zhiyong, an activist who lost his legs when soldiers fired on demonstrators in 1989, told poloff there were no organized or public activities. All was quiet at the family residence of former Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang, whose death over a year ago sparked renewed calls for a reassessment of June 4. There was no visible security presence or activity at the home, although a number of cars were parked near the entrance. The police station across the alley from Zhao's front door was also quiet.

¶5. (C) Head of the Tiananmen Mothers group Ding Zilin issued an appeal for reassessment of the 1989 Tiananmen events on May 29, but few in the Mainland were aware of it. There was no commentary in Mainland media on the anniversary and a reference to the anniversary by the MFA spokesperson at the regular June 1 press briefing was deleted from the published transcript. No comments on the June 4 anniversary were apparent on Mainland chatrooms monitored by Embassy staff.

Comment

¶6. (C) While the issue of the Chinese Communist Party's assessment of Tiananmen remains a rallying cry for activists and intellectuals here and triggers intensified security, current-day university students know little of the 1989 events and many others have moved on. As noted reftel, however, for many reformers and elites, a reassessment of Tiananmen remains the key test of China's political transition and they continue to press for movement toward a full reckoning by the government. One reformer e-mail listserve was circulating information this week on how the 1980 Kwangju Massacre in South Korea has been addressed by the government there in recent years, an oblique way of building solidarity among those who can not forget.

RANDT